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HISTORICAL AND PHILOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS ON *MARMORARII* IN BYZANTINE PALESTINE IN THE LIGHT OF TWO GREEK INSCRIPTIONS*

The object of the present research is to survey the presence and activities of *marmorarii* in Byzantine Palestine and to review the special terminology pertaining to their profession. This research has a twofold aim: (a) to examine some inscriptions relating to the quarrying and trading of marble in Roman and Byzantine Palestine, and (b) to throw light on ethnic and social factors relevant to the pursuit of this profession during this period.

1. MARBLE, THE MARBLE TRADE AND MARMORARII

The Romans developed a special predilection for marble after they became acquainted with its use in the monumental architecture of Greece and Asia Minor (Blake 1947: 50–60). According to Latin authors from the first century B.C. and the first century A.D. (e.g., Horace, *Carmina* II 18; Seneca, *Ad Lucilium—Epistolae Morales* LXXXVI 6–7), Roman society made extensive not to say excessive use of marble, a fact that is fully borne out by archaeological remains from this period (Blake 1959: 20, 30, 92, 94, 104).

From the first century onwards the Romans developed a marble architecture based on Greek imports accompanied by the influx of Greek artisans who were the first *marmorarii* (Heilmeyer 1973: 23). During the reign of Augustus, of whom Suetonius (*Div. Aug.* 28, 3) said that he left behind him a Rome *(marmoream ... quam latericiam accepisset)*, Italian marble from

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Luni / Carrara became the main supply source of the marble, as it is still today for the modern luxury market. In addition to exploiting Carrara marble, the Romans continued to import into Italy marble from Greece, Asia Minor, and North Africa. This trend reflects something of a revolution in the traditional concepts of Roman architectural planning, design, and decoration, the incorporation of marble representing one of the changes in Roman architectural taste and in other domains.

Marmorarii were to play an important role within the system of marble quarrying and diffusion—the infrastructure for which had been established during the first and second centuries A.D., mainly as a result of other revolutionary changes occurring in Roman economy, technology, social structure, and political life.[1]

2. Greek and Latin Technical Terms Relating to Marble Workers

A man who quarried marble, called in Latin *marmorarius* (Lewis & Short: s.v.), was designated μαρμαράριος or μαρμάρις in Greek (cf. Liddell & Scott: s.v. μαρμαράριος, μαρμάρις); this term is obviously a hellenized form of the Latin word. At an earlier period, i.e., during Classical and Hellenistic times, the Greeks had used the terms λιθοῦργος or λιθοξόος and μαρμαροποίος for a marble worker (Liddel & Scott: 1049, 1081; cf. Blümner III: 187–188). The Romans derived their own term independently by suffixing the Latin agentive suffix *-arius* to the Greek root μάρμαρον for *marmor* (marble) (Weise 1882: 157–158); this yielded the term *marmorarius* (*PW-RE* 14.2: 1897–1899; Daremberg & Saglio III.2: 1605–1606; Calabi-Limentani 1961).

Marmorarii are mentioned in a large number of Latin inscriptions., which sometimes also provide interesting information concerning the social status of this group, most of whom were apparently freedmen. Funerary steles sometimes also depict their tools (Calabi-Limentani 1961; Zimmer 1982: 167–168, no. 91), and one inscription even advertises a *marmorarius* (*CIL* VI, 9556; cf. Alföldy 1989: 174, n. 53). The place of *marmorarii* in the economic system was later officially recognized by Diocletian's Price Edict, where a daily salary of 60 Denarii is assigned to a *marmorario* (= μαρμαράριω) as compared with the sum of 50 Denarii for 'simple' *lapidarii* (*Ed. Diocl.* [ed. Frank] VII, 5; VII, 2). Their salary was actually surpassed

1 The issue has been recently summed up in Dodge 1991. Ward-Perkins dedicated many studies to it; for instance, his last, 'Nicomedia and the Marble Trade', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 48:23–69, 1980, with bibliography; for summaries and discussion of specific issues see, for instance, Fant (ed.) 1988; and Herz and Waelkens (eds.) 1988, *passim*. For a summing up concerning the use of marble at one site (Palmyra), see Dodge 1988. I have discussed the matter in *Marble Studies: Roman Palestine and the Marble Trade* (Series *Xenia*, Konstanz, forthcoming).

only by those of wall-painters (75 Denarii) and of portrait-painters, who were entitled to a record salary of 150 Denarii a day (VII, 8–9).

Highly noteworthy from the purely linguistic angle is the fact that Diocletian's Edict admits into official usage the parallel Latin and Greek terminology for this type of artisan, such that Lat. *marmorarius* becomes identified with Gk. μαρμαράριος. It is noteworthy that the term *marmorarius* reentered the Greek lexicon as a form of the Latin term, like many other official and everyday Latin *termini technici* which reflected the *realia* of Greek provinces under Roman rule (Mason 1974; Cameron 1931; Frend 1956: 48, 51); this was somehow a sort of romanization. In this case, we may regard it as a by-product of the diffusion of marble production and trade established by the Roman Imperial authorities. From this point of view, it is perhaps worth recalling, that the variant μαρμαράριος occurs for the first time in an inscription no earlier than the first third of the third century A.D. From this time onwards, it occurs mainly in the Late Roman and Byzantine periods (Robert 1960: 28–30). Its latest attestation, it seems, harks back probably to the tenth century (Gregoire 1922: 78).

Like other artisans, *marmorarii* were organized in corporations *(collegia)* (Marquardt & Mau 1886, II: 623; Liebenam 1890), a fact which apparently did not affect their mobility. After a workshop closed, they had to seek new sources of income so that they became itinerant artisans just like marble workers in ancient Greece (Burford 1969: 203–206; Friedlaender 1923: 92–93). The itinerant nature of a marble worker's profession was sometimes even promoted by Imperial authority (Dio Cassius, *Epit.* LXII). On the other hand, there were also attempts to constrain their mobility in order to create or to protect provincial workshops.[2] It seems, however, that *marmorarii* were the most mobile stone-cutters of their time, mainly on account of the special stone they had to work with it. A drastic change in this state of affairs began from the fourth century A.D. onwards when, due to the deteriorating state of monuments and to maintenance problems, transfer of artisans from one province to another was prohibited by law and endeavours were made to encourage local artisans, *marmorarii* included, to continue working at their place of origin (*Cod. Theod.* 10, 19, 5; 13, 4, 2; cf. MacMullen 1964: 49–53).

3. ROMAN PALESTINE AND THE MARBLE TRADE

Palestine entered the Mediterranean marble trade after the tragic period of the two Jewish Wars (66–135 A.D.), when it obviously seems to have

2 Perhaps this is how we should interpret Trajan's answer to Pliny the Younger's request for an architect, *Ep.* X, 40, 3: *Architecti tibi deesse non possunt. Nulla provincia non et peritos et ingeniosos homines habet; modo ne existimes brevius esse ab urbe mitti, cum es Graecia etiam ad nos venire soliti sint;* cf. X, 37, 3. Note also the rather similar style of correspondence relating to a *mensor* in: *Ep.* X, 18; cf. X, 17 b.

enjoyed the 'pax Romana' of the period of Hadrian and the Antonines, which reached its peak under the Severans (Tsafrir 1984; Isaac 1990; cf. Hasebroek 1923; Applebaum 1969).

Archaeological excavations and surveys have revealed, however, that in Palestine marble reached mainly three towns: the harbour cities of Caesarea and Ascalon on the Mediterranean coast, and Scythopolis (Beth She'an) in the Jordan Valley. That marble reached this rather distant city, about 70 kms. east of Caesarea, is obviously ascribable to the existence of the Roman road linking the two cities. In fact, Scythopolis was richly adorned with marble, and on a similar scale and quality with Gilboan limestone (from a quarry 10 kms west of the city) and not with local basalt, as recent excavations have once more revealed . The fact that no marble could have been attributed to Roman Aelia Capitolina is relevant too, and, it probably reflects the difficulties of transporting marble up the Judean hills, despite the good Roman roads linking the city to most other localities. On the other hand, it is striking that no marble is to be found at Antipatris despite its ideal position: in the plain, close to the sea-shore, and at the crossing point of two main Roman roads, one from Caesarea to Jerusalem and the other from Jaffa to Neapolis. It seems that other factors besides purely logistic ones, weighed with the town authorities in their attitude towards marble.[3]

At any rate, marble was used in Palestine for architectural decoration (Fischer 1990; 1991), statuary (Gersht 1987), sarcophagi (Koch 1989) and for minor arts. Unfortunately, this situation is not reflected in historical records. The only sources mentioning marble imports in general, and the use of some specific marble items in particular, are the Mishna, the Talmud, etc., which sometimes even include details concerning the origin of the marble.[4] In Jewish sources, marble is called either מרמרה or שיש but no special term occurs for a marble worker. It seems that the Hebrew term אמנה (artisan) also referred to profession.[5]

In Palestine, however, *marmorarii* do not appear in inscriptions or historical sources despite of the flourishing 'marble boom' of the 2nd and 3rd

3 For Jerusalem / Aelia Capitolina from the Byzantine period the difficulties are clearly revealed by Procopius, *On the Buildings*, V, 6,19, in a historical account of the erection of the Nea Church, where stone from the nearby quarries was used in preference to marble, which was probably impossible to lift; cf. Avigad 1983: 229–246. Concerning the position of Antipatris in the road system, see Roll-Ayalon 1986: 113–114, esp. Fig. 4 (map).

4 Thus, for example, *Perkaunesin*, obviously Proconnesus, is mentioned as one of the main sources of marble (*Midrash Esther*, for I 6). This has been proved by isotopic analysis recently carried out by Ze'ev Pearl, Weitzmann Institute, Rehovot; see Pearl-Magaritz 1991.

5 Krauss 1910, I: 14, 288–289, fn.165; Klausner 1975: 186–188, 362. Jewish sources concerning marble are discussed by Mrs. Ziona Grossmark in our forthcoming study on marble trade in Roman Palestine. Concerning the issue in general, see Krauss 1910: 53; Roth-Gerson 1987: 60, fn. 12; see also Urbach 1959 and Loew 1936.

centuries A.D. This is evidently a matter of chance, because, in fact, they must have been present, as attested by the aforementioned wealth of architectural and artistic remains from the Roman period. Moreover, during this period, a local marble tradition was actually created, and we can presume that later use of marble in Palestine must have been based on this previous experience.

Nevertheless, building activity in general is reflected by frequent attestation of the terms αρχιτέκτων, οικοδόμος, τεχνίτης, λιθοξοός in inscriptions from Syria and Palestine harking back to the Roman and Byzantine periods (Butler 1929: 255–257, though not a single *marmorarius* is mentioned!). In the Negev (actually, Arabia Petraea) some οἰκοδόμοι are mentioned (Negev 1981: 15, no. 1a, 4, and 13). In the area of the Roman theatre at Scythopolis (Beth She'an) Applebaum unearthed an inscribed altar dedicated by the οἰκοδόμος Αβσελάμος (Applebaum 1978). A λαξός is known from the Scythopolis area, although he himself originated in Phaene, today Mushennef in Jordan (Ovadiah & Roll 1988). At Byzantine Nessana οἰκοδόμοι are mentioned both in papyri (no. 79.24) and inscriptions (no. 72). Two אמנה (= τεχνῖται) are mentioned in Hebrew inscriptions from Alma and Scythopolis (Naveh 1978: 22–23; 78–79), and τεχνῖται are mentioned in the mosaic inscription from the synagogue of Beth Alpha (Roth-Gerson 1987: no. 4).

4. MARBLE AND *MARMORARII* IN BYZANTINE PALESTINE

In Byzantine Palestine, however, *marmorarii* are mentioned twice in inscriptions, once as μαρμάρ(αρ)ιος, and once as μαρμάρις (see below). Both *marmorarii* are linked with the revival of marble importation which occurred in Byzantine Palestine. After a period of discontinuity of massive marble transactions and periods of interruption and stagnation in the exploitation of marble quarries and in imports,[6] also affecting Palestine, a reactivation began to be felt in the middle of the 4th century A.D., mainly due to the first impulses of the Emperors towards the Holy Land (Avi-Yonah 1958: 42–43). Some building projects of this time had to be accompanied by τεχνῖται καὶ ἐργατάι from Constantinople, as in the case of the

6. The shortage of imports is primarily evident from the tendency of recycling building materials from existing buildings as 'spolia', as in the example of the Tiberias capital. Deichmann 's 1975 treatment of this point is invaluable. The Arch of Constantine in Rome as a typical example of official spoliation, pp. 6–8; this sometimes also occurred during the second and third centuries, but seems to have been coordinated by officials, see Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* X, 37. On the other hand, legislation was passed against the demolition of existing buildings and measures were taken to encourage the opening of new quarries in order to improve the situation, cf., *Cod. Theod.* 10, 19, 2. Concerning the state of 'traditional' quarries during this transitional period, see Asgari 1978: 470–472, who points out that, in spite of continued exploitation of the site, there were fewer finds from the Byzantine period.

erection of the Holy Sepulchre (Eusebius, *Vita Const.* III, 32–40), when these artisans actually settled down in Jerusalem and its environs. Marbles from Karystos were brought for the columns of the church of Gaza, donated by the Empress Eudoxia in 402 A.D., where a certain Rufinus, an architect from Antioch, was in charge (Marc. Diaconus, *Vita Porphyrii* 75–79; 84; cf. Glucker 1987: 47–48; Avi-Yonah 1958: 42–43). A genuine revival, however, occurred only from the time of Theodosius II onwards, reaching its peak during the sixth century A.D. (Avi-Yonah 1958: Tsafrir 1984: 391–400).

A noteworthy development relating to the supply of marble in the fifth and sixth centuries is that now marble reached more places than in the previous 'boom' of the second and third centuries A.D. The amount of marble involved, however, were considerably reduced, and the manner of its use also changed . Thus, for example, no more complete 'sets of facades' were delivered to one building, and, in general, fewer marble items were now designated to the buildings. In many cases, for example, only columns, or capitals, or sometimes only chancel-screens were of marble. Sometimes revetment slabs for wall or for pavements were of marble. As can be inferred from this, there was much combination of marble and local stone in one and the same building. Marble was used throughout the entire province(s) of Palestine, not only in the maritime towns and other main cities, but also in far away places in Galilee or in the Negev, and even in smaller villages, monasteries, churches and synagogues.[7] This may help to explain how a *marmorarius* like Nilos, mentioned in an inscription from Hebron (reproduced below: no. 2) could have been active in the Negev. In this connection, it is noteworthy that at Mampsis the name of another (?) Nilos occurs three times in the inscriptions on the mosaic pavement of the western church (Negev 1981, nos. 80–84), where marble was used rather profusely (Negev 1988).

Even from a cursory examination of the marble items occurring in Palestine at this time, it is quite obvious that the revived marble trade now dealt exclusively with liturgical artefacts such as chancel-screens, baptismal fonts etc., many of them bearing the signs of a centralized, Constantinopolitan, marble industry and artistic style.

It is probably correct to surmise that in addition to imported supplies, a part of the marble recorded in Byzantine Palestine originated from dismantled older ruins or neglected buildings and thus became a kind of

7 The following references will suffice to illustrate our point; *Mampsis:* Negev 1988: 95–96, photographs 96 and 98; 104–107, Fig. 11, nos. 188–189, photographs 126–131; *Nessana:* Colt 1962: 48–50, pls. XII.2, XVII–XIX; *Rehovot-in-the-Negev:* Tsafrir et al. 1988: 122–129; *Sobota:* Rosenthal-Heginbottom 1982: 1796, Fig. 6; *Marbles in synagogues:* mainly chancel-screens and revetment slabs: Foerster 1974; Yeivin 1974: 201–209; for a 'Seat of Moses' made of marble in the Ascalon synagogue see Hüttenmeister-Reeg 1977: 23, 26.

'naturalized' marble. Imperial authorities, however, did try to prohibit this practice and to encourage the opening of new marble quarries, as we mentioned above. Like towns all over the Mediterranean, the Byzantine towns of Palestine also had to face acute problems relating to the maintenance of monuments (Ward-Perkins 1984; Foss 1970; 1976). While some of these, mainly the 'unwanted classical buildings' (Ward-Perkins 1984: ch. 10) gradually lost their importance and were handed over to be demolished and their marble reused, others went on to play an important role, such as aqueducts (like that of Caesarea Maritima restored in 385 A.D.; Hamburger 1959), *thermae* or theatres, even if their character had completely changed and their maintenance created further difficulties.[8]

Despite all these changes and the problems the towns had to face, it seems that Byzantine urban society reveals a continuously classicistic attitude, at least concerning the reuse of existing monuments, sculptures, statues etc. and their integration in the new urban landscape.[9]

5. THE INSCRIPTIONS

By way of portraying the background to the revival of the use of marble in Byzantine Palestine we shall examine the presence of *marmorarii* in two inscriptions from that period. Both are written in Greek, which was the *lingua franca* of Palestine as of many other regions of the Eastern part of the Empire until the end of antiquity.

A. The inscription from Tiberias (Fig. 1, pl. I).

The inscription (Schwabe 1954; Roth-Gerson 1987: 58–60, No. 14; see also 165–166)[10] is carved on the abacus front of a revetment panel which was attached to a pilaster-capital. It consists of two lines and is divided by the abacus-flower into two sections. A difference is visible between the left section and the right section of the inscription. The letters on the left side are accurately carved and evenly spaced. On the right side, however, the *lapidarius* had some difficulties in inserting the letters into the available space, probably because the inscription was carved after the right upper

8 As illustrated for Ostia in Meiggs 1973: 419–420, the restoration of the Imperial thermae are often 'shoddy' works in which old materials was reused, mosaics were patched with marble, and floors were paved even with funerary inscriptions!

9 For Palestine, see the example of the Caesarea 'Street of Statues', Yeivin 1955: 123. Also noteworthy in this connection is Avi-Yonah's statement "obviously, we have here a Byzantine open-air museum implying the use of earlier statuary, and remotely comparable to the Meidan at Constantinople with its trophies" (1957: 123).

10 The item belongs to the collection of the Israel Antiquities Authority, Inventory no. 69–5281; the photograph is published here through the courtesy of the Authority (Negative no. 57 253). I am grateful to Mr. Amir Drori, Director of the Authority for his cooperation. The measurements of the white marble capital are as follows: height, 34 cms; width, upper part, 33 cm; width, lower part, 25 cm; thickness, 6–8 cm.

corner of the abacus had been broken. The letters are 2 cms high. The text of the inscription reads:

Ἡ Θεοῦ χάρις / μετὰ /Αβραμίου / μαρμάρ(αρ)ιου

Translation: God's grace to Abraham the marble worker!

Both Schwabe and Roth-Gerson have already pointed out that the formula ἡ Θεοῦ χάρις μετὰ [τινος] does not occur in this form in Jewish epigraphy, though given its Biblical colouring such a greeting or blessing formula must have been current among Palestinian Jews; note, for instance, the closely analogous Hebrew expression חסד אלויהים Glueck 1927:92–95). It should be noted, however, that in Christian inscriptions too the formula ἡ θεοῦ χάρις μετὰ τινος seems to have been very popular throughout the Eastern provinces, at least from the fifth century A.D. onwards (Meimaris 1986: nos. 78, 91, 469: Welles 1938: nos. 299–300; Kraemer 1958: no. 145; Jalabert & Mouterde 1955: nos. 1306a, 1570, 1600, 1703, 1785, 1959, 1985). The formula μεγάλαι χάριτες τοῦ θεοῦ occurs on an entaglio from Emesa (Cumont 1926). It obviously continues formulas occurring frequently in the NT, mainly in St. Paul's letters (Eph. 3, 7–8; Cor. 15, 10) where it occurs also as η χάρις τοῦ κυρίου (2 Thess. 3, 18; cf. Rom. 12, 6; 15, 5; Hebr. 13, 25; Rev. 22, 21; cf. Bauer & Preuschen 1928: 1399; Friedrich 1973: 363–393). In some synagogue inscriptions the Hebrew / Aramaic formula ברכה תבא במעשיו occurs for this kind of blessing addressed by an artisan or a donor (Kohl & Watzinger 1916: 90–91; cf. Naveh 1978, s.v.).

The name Αβράμιος, Abraham, the Patriarch's name, was not popular among Jews during the Roman and Byzantine periods (only occasionally: Welles 1956: 278, no. 25; SEG 8, 1937: no. 145), as is evident from inscriptions in the synagogues and the necropolis at Beth She'arim (Schwabe & Lifshitz 1974: 25–26, no. 42) or of the Talmudic onomastikon (*Thesaurus* I: 98–102, s.v. אברהם). The Jewish Patriarch was adopted by the Christians, however, and received an honorable place among the saints (NT: Math. 1,17; Meimaris 1986: 86; Lefebvre 1907: XXIX), his name becoming, like many other Biblical ones, frequent among Christians. In Greek inscriptions it shows up as Αβρααμ, Αβραμιος, Αβραμις, Αβραμ, Αβραμιος (Wuthnow 1930: 10–11; Pape & Benseler 1911: s.v. *Abraam*). Even a fleeting examination of the name lists occurring in various collections of inscriptions from Egypt (Lefebvre 1907: nos. 213, 272, 551, etc.), Syria, and Palestine (Meimaris 1986: 14 times) is sufficient to establish the wide currency of this name among Christians. Thus, for example, in the Nessana papyri it occurs no fewer than 74 times (Kraemer 1958: 334, s.v.), at Sobota 4 times (Negev 1981: nos. 57, 58, 60, 63), and at Elusa, an Abraham is in charge of the remaking of the pavement (Negev 1981: no. 92). An Αβραμιος son of Patricius, the deacon, occurs at Gaza in an obviously Christian context (Glucker 1987: 125, no. 10; cf. 160, Index c.: Hebrew names).

Thus both the formula and the name in this inscription seem to indicate a Christian assignation.

Examining the archaeological and architectural context of the item is, unfortunately, a rather difficult task, since, in absence of any archaeological report of the excavation, we have to base our assumptions exclusively on Schwabe's description. According to Schwabe, the item was uncovered together with another marble slab bearing an Aramaic inscription, as *spolium* in the substructure of the *frigidarium* (?) of a bath-house which thus represents the *terminus ad quem* of those marble finds. Schwabe judged both these items as belonging to an earlier synagogue (1954: 161) but, in our opinion, neither the formula nor the name used in the inscription, not to mention the unclear archaeological context, point unambiguously in this direction.

All these considerations are highly important especially in regard to the origin and character of Tiberias. Founded by Herod Antipas as a mixed city (Josephus, *A.J.* 18, 2, 3 [36–38]; cf. Avi-Yonah 1950; Hirschfeld, ed. 1988) and probably with a pagan population and pagan monuments also (such as a Hadrianeum: Epiphanius, *Haer.* 30,12 [*PG* 41, 426]; Kindler 1961: 39, 57, no. 7, pl. 88), Tiberias still became the most important Jewish city of Palestine during the third to fifth century A.D. especially after the *sanhedrin* and the *nasi* (Patriarch) had established their seats there (Oppenheimer 1988). Thus it is not surprising that after the beginning of official Christianity, Tiberias became the centre of struggles between Jews and Christians for supremacy in the town and its neighbourhood, following Christian successes in several areas around the Lake of Tiberias (Tsafrir 1967: 79–87, n. 50; Stemberger 1987: 69). It seems that Christian buildings were actually erected at Tiberias too, as in other Jewish towns (Stemberger 1987: 69; Ovadiah 1970: 180–181; Bagatti 1967). A bishop of Tiberias is known from the time of the Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.). Nevertheless, even in these conditions, interaction took place between Jews and Christians of the area, and this had its impact on everyday life, art included. A marble chancel-screen originating in Tiberias may also be relevant here (Foerster 1974: 196, pl. 40B). It is decorated by a seven-branched *menorah* flanked heraldically by birds, all of them carved on the upper part of the frame. It has been shown that this motif is rare in Jewish art, but with a cross instead of the *menorah* it is very common in Christian art (Dauphin 1978: 28, n. 80).

When we take into consideration the complex relationship between Jews and Christians in general and in the Holy Land in particular (Simon 1964; Stemberger 1987), a distinction should be made between the countryside and the cities. In the countryside it seems that there was quite a clear regional delimitation between Jewish and Christian settlements, which can also be observed in the realm of archaeology (Ma'oz 1985; Dauphin 1982; Meyers 1988). However, in the larger cities of Palestine a kind of co-existence of

various communities became the rule, even if they lived in more or less strictly delimited quarters (Levine 1975: 29–31; 44–45; Avi-Yonah 1962).

As to the artistic consequences of this situation, it is generally agreed today that there were common workshops for Jews, pagans, and Christians (Kohl & Watzinger 1916: 70; Avi-Yonah 1975) and it would therefore not be surprising to find some unorthodox interaction. We should therefore be aware of the pitfalls when attempting to delimit and to discern between artistic and linguistic expression common to both Christians and Jews.

To return to the character of the inscription itself, it is clear that it was not the signature of an artisan, since this would probably have been formulated with ἐποίησεν (Marcadé 1953–1957) but a dedicatory inscription, even if in this case it would seem that the dedicator was the artisan himself (see below). Moreover, the carving of inscriptions on capitals used as tectonic elements, represents a strange phenomenon *per se*. In the Greco-Roman world very few examples of real inscriptions on capitals are known. Those from the Athenian Acropolis, for example, belonged to small dedicatory columns or bases for votive objects (Raubitschek 1949: 47–59, nos. 46–57). Letters on capitals representing masons' marks or abbreviated names for accounts occur especially during the Roman period (Heilmeyer 1970: 20–21; Fischer 1990: nos. 44, 45, 50, 125–128). Dedicatory inscriptions, however, normally occur on lintels and mosaics from the Late Roman period onwards, and sometimes on columns. A relatively large number of such columns occur at Gerasa (Welles 1938: 408–414, nos. 72–73, 75–104), while some isolated examples are known from the synagogue of Capernaum (Sapir & Ne'eman 1967: 47–54, nos. 3.51–52) and from the Northern complex at Nessana (Kirk & Welles 1962: 167, no. 77).

As for inscribed capitals, a certain number have been found in the Syro-Palestinian area. One of the most outstanding examples is that of an Ionic capital from Emmaus (Latrun, Israel) (Vincent & Abel 1932: 235–237, pl. XXV, 1–2, fig. 105), where on both *echini* inscriptions with religious acclamations, one in Greek, the second in Samaritan, have been carved. Another interesting inscription was carved in a medallion in the middle of the *calathus* of a capital at Qasr el-Benat (Syria) mentioning the tomb of the architect Κυριος, perhaps the same man who under slightly different names (Kyris, Kyros, Kyrillos, etc.) was responsible for the construction of several churches in that area during the years 390–415 A.D. (Butler 1929: 255; Prentice 1908: 93, no. 76). Further capitals displaying the same type of inscriptions (and decoration) in central medallions are known from the area of Apamea (Strube 1983: 64–65, pls. 10; 15–17). A Corinthian capital with a bilingual (Greek and Hebrew) inscription was recorded by Clermont-Ganneau in the Great Mosque of Gaza (1896: 393–395; SEG 8, 1937: no. 276; Glucker 1987: 144–145, no. 37). Surprisingly, a large number of inscribed *abaci* of capitals comes from the Negev towns in the later Roman

and Byzantine periods. Thus, three examples are known from the northern church of Rehovot-in-the-Negev (Patrich 1988: 101, nos. 3–4). Here pseudo-Doric capitals with inscriptions carved along the whole abacus-front have been revealed. They contain the names and patronymics of donors, and are dated around 460–470 A.D., one of these individuals being known from another inscription as one of the donors of the church (Tsafrir 1988: 26). Other examples come from Nessana (Kirk & Welles 1962: nos. 17, 64, 73–75, 95, 99) and a further four inscribed capitals are from Sobota (Rosenthal-Heginbottom 1982: 107–109, nos. 27–30, pl. 47 B). All are dedicatory inscriptions using the formula ὑπὲρ τῆς σωτηρίας. One inscription from Nessana (no. 92) is a devotional inscription.

In the light of the inscribed capitals exemplified above and the character of accompanying formulas, it would seem that the Tiberias inscription could be interpreted both as a dedicatory inscription and a blessing or greeting inscription (Schwabe 1954: 162; Roth-Gerson 1987: 60). It seems likely that Abraham was the marble worker who carved the marble item(s) of the building, this capital included. As to the inscription, it might have been dedicated by Abraham himself, as was usual in dedicatory inscriptions, or by the community who ordered the work. Anyhow, because of the narrow space designated for the inscription, there was no place for more explanatory details. It is likely, however, that if our Abraham had come from another region, he would have mentioned it explicitly one way or another. Hence, there is a close connection between the dedicator, Abraham, a marble worker and the item itself, a fact which makes an examination of the artistic milieu even more necessary.

According to the design of the calathus, the acanthus leaves and the volutes and helices, this capital is obviously an expression of 'post-classical' architectural decoration when standarized principles were often given up and heterodox tendencies became prominent (Heilmeyer 1970: 121; cf. Fischer 1986: 132–133; 1990: 44–47). Such features occur in a series of examples from the 4th and 6th centuries A.D., such as pilaster panels from the synagogue of Sardis (Hanfmann 1972: 192–193, figs. 145–146), mid-5th cent. A.D. capitals from Abu Menas in Egypt (Severin & Severin: 41, no. 11, fig. 36), and impost capitals from Caesarea Maritima from the Justinianic period (Frova 1967).

To sum up, we conclude that this capital seems to be the end product of a complex evolution which characterized the 'post-classical' reaction to the interchange of marble import and local stone production in the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D.. Thus, it could well be placed chronologically between the mid-fourth and the mid-fifth century A.D.

The inscription, and implicitly the capital, were assigned by both Schwabe and Roth-Gerson to the Byzantine period, which is quite accept-

able.[11] Its archaeological *terminus post quem* is revealed by the bath-house where it was re-used. Recently published mosaic pavements from this building have been dated to the end of the fifth and the beginning of the sixth century A.D. (Telgam 1988: 125–131), and thus largely concur with our chronological conclusions. Furthermore, considering the facts presented here, the capital can be attributed to a local, presumably Tiberian, workshop, where Abraham, the marble worker was active and whence he prayed for the Θεοῦ χάρις.

B. The inscription from Hebron (Fig. 2, pl. II).

The second inscription presented here, was carved on a marble slab, still part of the wall-facing in the southeastern corner of the mosque in the Patriarchs' Tombs in Hebron. Since 1845, when it was published for the first time, it has been copied and re-edited several times but has never been discussed and interpreted (Mader 1918: 134–135, fn. 1; Vincent & MacKay & Abel 1923: 161, fig. 68; cf. *SEG* 8, 1937: no. 240).[12] Its photograph is published here for the first time. The letters are 3 cms high. The inscription reads:

[+] Ἅγιε Ἀβράαμα, βωήθι τὸν <δ>οῦ
λὸν σου Νῖλον τὸν δ<ε> μαρμα-
ράρην καὶ Ἀγαθήμερον
καὶ Ὑγίαν, καὶ Ὡμαβις, καὶ Θω
μασίαν καὶ Ἀβ<δ>ὰλλα καὶ Ἀνα
στασίαν.

Translation: (+) Saint Abraham, help your servant Nilos, the marble worker, and Agathemeros and Hygia, and Omabis and Thomasia, and Abdallah and Anastasia!

Thus, Saint Abraham's intercession is requested by the *marmorarius* (μαρμαράρις) Nilos and his family (?) consisting of three pairs, each including a man and a woman.

As stated before, Ἅγιος Ἀβραάμιος, the Christian version of the traditional Jewish Patriarch's name became one of the main religious strategies employed by Christians endeavouring to ensure a linkage between their beliefs and Biblical tradition. As to the formula βωήθι τὸν δοῦλον σου used here, it is perhaps the most common kind of short prayer for help found in Christian inscriptions from the 4th century A.D. onwards, addressing God, Jesus, Christ, the Lord, or the Saints (Jalabert & Mouterde 1926: 623–694).

11 DiSegni 1988 is a palaeographic attempt at dating it to the period between the second and third centuries A.D. I find rather misleading the author's conclusion to the effect that: "... this is the foundation date of the synagogue as well, since the dedicator was one of the artisans who participated in its building" (*op. cit.*, 72–73).

12 I am indebted to Dr. Ute Schillinger, University of Konstanz, for drawing my attention to this inscription.

Since such inscriptions often occur in evident places in churches, such as door lintels or mosaic pavements laid in front of entrances, chancel screens, or the *pastophoria*, it seems that they should be attributed to rich and influential members of the community, or to pilgrims who visited the place and made a donation to the monument.

Besides establishing the fact that Nilos is also a *marmorarius*, this inscription offers a complex ethno-onomastic list contributing to the elucidation of the milieu to which the marble worker Nilos belonged. The name Nilos is of Egyptian origin (Lefebvre 1908: nos. 6, 82, 321; Preisigke 1922: 227, 235; see also *narrationes* of St. Nilus: *PG* 79, 577–580). A certain Nilos signed as pilgrim at the St. George monastery, Wadi Qelt (Meimaris 1986: no. 1119). The other names are rather heterogeneous: Agathemeros (Pape & Benseler 1911: 3; Preisigke 1922:5) and Hygia (Pape & Benseler 1911: 392; Preisigke 1922: 451) are Greek; Omabis (Wuthnow 1930: 58, Ιμαβουας, 88 Ομαβι as a combination of אם (mother) and אב (father); cf. PPUAES III A: no. 95; PPUAES III 7: no. 800.2) and Thomasia (obviously the feminine of Thomas) are Aramaic. Abdallah is Arabic (Wuthnow 1930: 7) and is very frequent in Nessana papyri (Kraemer 1958: nos. 71, 76, 79), occurring also at Oboda (Negev 1981: no. 39). And finally, Anastasia is a purely Christian creation (Preisigke 1922: 29). This list of names yields a faithful sampling of the onomastic norms of Byzantine Palestine, mainly in its southern region (Kraemer 1958: 17, 24–25; Negev 1981: 84–88; also Sartre 1985: 141–152). Given the patently Christian manner of addressing Saint Abraham here, the religious attribution is beyond all doubt. It is well known that the Patriarchs' Tombs became a venerated centre of Christian pilgrimage, even if the place remained open to Jewish pilgrims (Wilkinson 1977: 85; cf. Hunt 1984: 83–106).

As to the regional origin of the persons involved here, we have no further details. The narrow surface of the Tiberias capital possibly did not permit Abraham to add further details, but, as we have stated above, we believe that if he had deemed it necessary, he would have acted accordingly. In other words, Nilos, however, would have solved the space problem, if he had wanted to do so. We should therefore probably assume that both inscriptions refer to local persons, i.e., local *marmorarii*. Abraham was apparently an inhabitant of Tiberias; as for Nilos and his group, we would suggest that they came from the Negev, some of their names being quite popular in that region, and are recorded with great frequency on marble monuments from the fifth and sixth centuries A.D.

'Ethnics' and attributes identifying a subject's place of origin constitute an important element in many inscriptions. For instance, out of 221 inscriptions from the Jewish necropolis at Beth She'arim, in 21 cases ethnics (referring to geographic origins) are also appended (Schwabe & Lifshitz 1974: 228). As to builders and stone-workers from Palestine and Arabia,

ethnics are sometimes given; for instance, at Oboda (Negev 1981: 26–27, no. 13), the builder Wailos, surnamed Πετρσος, and in the Scythopolis area (Ovadiah & Roll 1988) a λαξός surnamed Φαινήσιος occur. In another case this detail is completely ignored (Applebaum, Isaac & Landau 1978: 139–140; n.13). These facts are relevant mainly to the issue of the role played by artisans both within the framework of marble production and the marble trade in the Empire as a whole, and in relation to local building practices. One of the main questions still remaining, to be settled is whether marble workers joined the transports or even settled in the countries of destination (such as the famous Ἀφροδισιεῖς), or whether the work was carried out and finished by local specialists (Heilmeyer 1970: 168–171; see now: Walda 1985: 48–49, 61).

What is certain is that both Abraham and Nilos were local *marmorarii* who probably felt encouraged by the Imperial policy aimed at animating local artisans. Their presence accords with the archaeological finds of the Byzantine period.

Furthermore, it seems quite clear that the profession of marble worker and the hellenized designation μαρμαράριος had both become usual as a result of endeavours by the Roman authorities promoting the marble industry and the marble trade in the Eastern Mediterranean. The attestations of these hellenized forms are also of linguistic interest since they attest to a Latin *terminus technicus* designating an artisan which eventually passed into Greek where it became fully integrated. This fact can be seen as one aspect of the Roman heritage which the Empire bequeathed to Byzantine civilization.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1. The Tiberias capital. Drawn by Judith Dekel, Institute of Archaeology, Tel Aviv University.

Fig. 2. The Hebron inscription. After Vincent, MacKay & Abel 1923, fig. 68.

Plate I. The Tiberias capital. By courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

Plate II. The Hebron inscription. Photo: Moshe L. Fischer.

ABBREVIATIONS

AA - Archaeologischer Anzeiger.
AAS - Annuaire des Antiquités Syriennes.
ADAJ - The Annual of the Department of Antiquities in Jordan.
AJA - American Journal of Archaeology.
ANRW - Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt.
BASOR - Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research.
BIES - Bulletin of the Israel Exploration Society.
BJb - Bonner Jahrbücher.

BMB - Bulletin du Musée de Beyrouth.
BullRab - The Louis Rabinowitz Fund for the Exploration of Ancient Synagogues (Jerusalem).
DarSag - Daremberg, Ch. - Saglio, Ed., Dictionnaire des Antiquités Grecques et Romaines.
DOP - Dumbarton Oaks Papers.
EAA - Enciclopedia dell'Arte Antica, Classica e orientale.
EAEHL - Encyclopaedia of the Archaeological Excavations of the Holy Land.
EPRO - Etudes préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire Romain.
ESI - Excavations and Surveys in Israel (Jerusalem).
IEJ - Israel Exploration Journal.
IstMitt - Istanbuler Mitteilungen.
JAC - Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum.
JRA - Journal of Roman Archaeology.
JRS - Journal of Roman Studies.
MAAR - Memoirs of the American Academy at Rome.
OJh - Jahreshefte des österreichischen Archaeologischen Instituts.
PAES - Publications of an American Expedition to Syria in 1895–1900. Part III.
PBSR - Papers of the British School at Rome.
PEFQSt - Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement.
PEQ - Palestine Exploration Quarterly.
PPUAES - Publications of the Princeton University Archaeological Expedition to Syria.
PW-RE - Pauly - Wissowa (eds.), Real-encyclopaedie des klassischen Altertums.
QDAP - The Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine.
RB - Revue Biblique.
RömMitt - Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archaeologischen Instituts, Abteilung Rom.
SCI - Scripta Classica Israelica.
SWP - Conder, C.R. & Kitchener, H.H. Survey of Western Palestine, 3 vols. (London).
ZDPV - Zeitschrift des deutschen Palaestina-Vereins.
ZPE - Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik.

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Plate I

Fig. 1.

Plate II

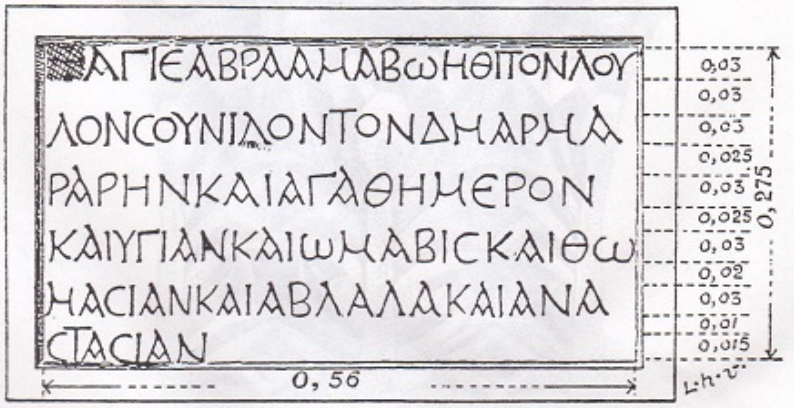

Fig. 2.